

# The Maly Trostenets "Extermination Camp"

## A Preliminary Historiographical Survey, Part 2

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### 3. A Brief Assessment of Anomalies, Contradictions and Incongruities

#### 3.1. The Victim Figure

In the table below I have summarized the various victim estimates presented above in order of magnitude:

**Table 2: The Maly Trostenets victim figure according to witnesses and Holocaust historians**

Source	Number of Victims
ESC Report of 25 July 1944	6,000
Mira Zaretskaya	500,000
Lev Lansky	299,000
ESC Report of 22 September 1944	206,500
Isak Grünberg	45,000
C. Gerlach	40,000 – 60,000

This table very much speaks for itself. It is fitting to quote here again Kohl's comment on the victim figure from the September 1944 ESC report (cf. §2.10.): "[the] total figure may be put into doubt. Perhaps it is speculation". Speculation, indeed.

#### 3.2. The Mass Graves at Blagovshchina and the Incineration of Their Contents

##### 3.2.1. The Allegedly Discovered Mass Graves

Paul Kohl informs us:

*"Immediately after the liberation of Minsk by the Red Army on 3 July 1944 an Extraordinary State Commission (ESC) investigated the Trostenez extermination camp. They took down the measurements of the 34 graves in the Blagovshchina Forest, determining the following dimensions: [...] According to the statements of the commission 150,000 people were murdered in the Blagovshchina Forest, 50,000 in the graves of Shashkovka and 6,500 in the barns at the estate [Gut Trostinetz]. The total number of victims of the Trostenez extermination camp amounted to 206,500 people according to the statements of the commission from July-August 1944."* [\[1\]](#)

Below I have reproduced the table found in Kohl's book listing the mass-grave dimensions as per the ESC, adding columns for area and volume as well as totals:

**Table 3: Graves reportedly found by the ESC at the Blagovshchina site** [\[2\]](#)

<b>Grave #</b>	<b>Dimensions (m)</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Volume</b>
1	50 x 5 x 5	250.0	1,250.0
2	27 x 4.5 x 5	121.5	607.5
3	42 x 5 x 4.5	210.0	945.0
4	50 x 5 x 5	250.0	1,250.0
5	38 x 5 x 5	190.0	950.0
6	24 x 5 x 5	120.0	600.0
7	58 x 5 x 5	290.0	1,450.0
8	57 x 5 x 5	285.0	1,425.0
9	53 x 5 x 5	265.0	1,325.0
10	45 x 5 x 5	225.0	1,125.0
11	51 x 5 x 5	255.0	1,275.0
12	5 x 5 x 4.5	25.0	112.5
13	50 x 5 x 4.5	250.0	1,125.0
14	45 x 5 x 5	225.0	1,125.0
15	9 x 2 x 5	18.0	90.0
16	35 x 5 x 5	175.0	875.0
17	30 x 6 x 5	180.0	900.0
18	27 x 5 x 5	135.0	675.0
19	69 x 5 x 5	345.0	1,725.0
20	5 x 3 x 5	15.0	75.0
21	27 x 5 x 5	135.0	675.0
22	27 x 5 x 5	135.0	675.0
23	30 x 5 x 5	150.0	750.0
24	15 x 5 x 5	75.0	375.0
25	6 x 4 x 5	24.0	120.0
26	10 x 5 x 5	50.0	250.0
27	6 x 4 x 5	24.0	120.0

28	6 x 4 x 5	24.0	120.0
29	6 x 4 x 5	24.0	120.0
30	6 x 5 x 5	30.0	150.0
31	6 x 5 x 5	30.0	150.0
32	50 x 5 x 5	250.0	1,250.0
33	36 x 5 x 5	180.0	900.0
34	36 x 5 x 5	180.0	900.0
Total:		5,140.5	25,460.0

### 3.2.2. The Credibility of the Extraordinary State Commission

There are many concrete reasons to view the figures presented by the Extraordinary State Commission *a priori* with extreme skepticism. Here it will suffice to mention two of them:

- In an ESC "Medico-legal report on atrocities committed by the Nazi German occupiers in the vicinity of Riga" dated 12 December 1944, it was established that no less than 101,000 people had been killed in the Salaspils camp east of Riga. The number of victims in the Riga region was stated as exceeding 300,000. Only a total of 549 corpses were, however, exhumed by the commission, which further reported that it had discovered a total of 58 burial excavations at the following 10 sites: Bikernieki Forest, the Salaspils camp, the old garrison cemetery in Salaspils, the New Jewish Cemetery, the Old Jewish Cemetery, Bishu-Muiza, the Pantzyr Barracks, Ziepnieku-Kalns, Rumbula Forest and Dreilin Forest. [3] As there were allegedly 6 mass graves each at Rumbula and Bikernieki [4], the number of graves discovered by the commission at Salaspils could not have exceeded (58-19=) 39. In an another medico-legal report, specifically concerning the Salaspils camp and dated 28 April 1945, it was determined that "7000 corpses from Soviet children" had been buried in mass graves occupying a "total area of 2500 square meters". 632 corpses of children had reportedly been exhumed from a total of 54 graves (thus one had supposedly discovered at least 15 additional grave pits at Salaspils in the four months since the first report). The commission further established that the Germans had run a "blood factory" wherein an unstated number of children, including infants, had had their blood drained to be used in transfusions for wounded German soldiers. [5] Contemporary Latvian experts such as H. Strods estimate, however, the number of Salaspils victims at only some 2,000, and the bizarre "blood factory" claim as well as the 7,000 buried child victims are viewed by them as fictitious. [6]
- In spring 1940 the Soviet secret police (NKVD) carried out a massacre of some 22,000 Polish officers and intellectuals in the Katyn Forest near the Russian city of Smolensk. In April 1943 German Wehrmacht soldiers discovered a grave with the corpses of 4,243 Polish reserve officers. Subsequently a forensic commission headed by experts from Axis as well as neutral nations exhumed and documented the mass graves, reaching the conclusion that the killings had been carried out in early 1940 when the area was still under Soviet control. [7] As a countermeasure, the Soviets in 1944 established a "Special Commission for Determination and

Investigation of the Shooting of Polish Prisoners of War by German-Fascist Invaders in Katyn Forest" which was to lay the blame for the massacre on the Germans. This was done by falsifying forensic evidence and by conjuring up a large number of false testimonies according to which German troops had committed the deed.<sup>[8]</sup> While Stalin failed in his attempt to have Katyn introduced as a charge against the Germans at IMT Nuremberg, a trial was conducted in Leningrad in December 1945-January 1946 at which seven Wehrmacht servicemen were charged with participating in the Katyn massacre; at least one of them, *Generalmajor* Heinrich Remlinger, was sentenced to death and executed.<sup>[9]</sup> The mendacious commission which had "proven" the guilt of the Germans at Katyn was headed by Professor Nikolai N. Burdenko, the President of the Academy of Medical Sciences of the USSR<sup>[10]</sup> – who was also head of the "Medico-Legal Commission of Experts" that investigated the alleged mass extermination at Maly Trostenets! The integrity of the ESC surveyors must therefore be regarded as nil from the outset.

The above examples go to show that the ESC in general and Burdenko in particular had a habit of engaging in fraud on a massive scale and were prone to wild exaggerations. It may further be mentioned that Burdenko also was one of the authors of the Soviet Auschwitz report, in which the number of victims of this "death camp" was stated as 4 million.<sup>[11]</sup>

It is very noteworthy in this context that only five of the alleged thirty-four Blagovshchina mass graves "were *partly* opened" (emphasis added, cf. §2.1.). Christian Gerlach remarks:

*"The number or dimensions of the mass graves is not entirely clear; only a few were opened. Usually the number of graves in Blagovshchina is stated as 34 ([the alleged perpetrators] Rube and Heuser spoke of 15 to 18 [...]), of which only [...] some were up to 50 meters long, and not all were 60 meters long [sic]. Their volume was thus clearly smaller than 25,000 cubic meters (which at a maximum of six corpses per cubic meter would correspond to up to 150,000 murdered people) but can not stated precisely. Even in 1944 the original dimensions of the mass graves were hardly determinable, due to excavation that Sonderkommando 1005 had carried out at the site using bulldozers."*<sup>[12]</sup>

It would appear that Gerlach, armchair historian that he is, is unaware of the possibilities of modern geophysical survey methods.

Here we should also recall Botvinnik's revelation that the ESC had reached their victim figure for the Blagovshchina site simply by multiplying the estimated total grave volume by an apparently arbitrary density of corpses per cubic meter (cf. §2.9.). The ESC claimed in their September 1944 report that 150,000 corpses had been buried at the Blagovshchina site, which means a density of  $(150,000 \div 25,460 \Rightarrow) 5.89$  corpses per cubic meter. Using instead the number of victims claimed by Gerlach for the active period of the Blagovshchina site (some 33,000) one gets a density of 1.3 corpses per cubic meter. Experts on forensic archeology point out that this method of estimating the number of dead in a mass grave is extremely unreliable, as the distribution of the body sizes may vary greatly from one group to another.<sup>[13]</sup>

In the context of the connection to the Soviet Katyn fraud, it is most interesting to note that, according to the English Wikipedia entry on Trostenets (cf. §1), an article<sup>[14]</sup> was published by one Igor Kuznyetsov in which it was asserted, supported in part by references to published sources,<sup>[15]</sup> that the Blagovshchina Forest had been the execution site of choice for the local branches of the NKVD prior to

the war. It must be pointed out that, while there is often talk of the Blagovshchina Forest, this was actually a copse rather than a forest. In fact, the verdict of the 1963 Koblenz trial describes the execution site using the word "copse" (Wäldchen). A look at a roughly contemporary map (Ill. 1) shows that the Blagovshchina copse, which was too insignificant to be named, measured only some 2.5 square kilometers. If both the Germans and the NKVD had used Blagovshchina as a site for mass executions, then it is almost inevitable that the former would sooner or later have uncovered traces of the crimes committed by the latter, yet in the testimonies I have had the opportunity to access so far there is not the slightest hint of such a discovery. Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to procure a copy of the above-mentioned article. If Kuznyetsov's claim is indeed correct, it would open the possibility that the ESC under Burdenko simply repeated the Katyn fraud at Blagovshchina, attributing Soviet mass graves to the Germans.

German military historian Joachim Hoffmann, while referring to the *Gruppe Arlt* activity reports (cf. §2.3) as evidence that at least 17,000 Jews were murdered at Trostenets, suggests that the victim figures claimed by the ESC (206,500 for Trostenets and 300,000 for the Minsk region) were used by Soviet propagandists to camouflage mass murders committed by the NKVD. Hoffmann cites an estimate that the number of NKVD victims in the Minsk region amounted to some 270,000; the graves of 102,000 of these victims were reportedly discovered near the village of Kuropaty in 1988. [\[16\]](#) Another source gives significantly lower estimates of the number of victims buried in Kuropaty (also spelled Kurapaty) of 30,000 or 7,000. [\[17\]](#)

Finally it is worth contrasting the "finds" of the ESC with what Soviet-Jewish propagandist Ilya Ehrenburg wrote about Trostenets in a *Pravda* article from 7 August 1944:

*"Shortly after the German withdrawal I went to Bolshoi Trostinets. Half-incinerated bodies, burned bodies, like firewood, heaps of bodies were still smoking. The children had been meticulously put at the end of each row. That was the last load, the one they did not manage to burn. Around me I saw excavated earth and a field of skulls. Since spring, the Germans had been burning the corpses of the victims previously buried, yet they were unable to finish the job. Bolshoi Trostinets near Minsk was one of the 'death factories'. Soviet POWs, Bielorusians, Jews from Minsk, from Vienna, from Prague were killed there by means of gas vans. One German engineer has improved these vans: Now the load bed is tilted back and discharges the corpses of the asphyxiated. Over 100,000 innocent people perished at Bolshoi Trostinets."* [\[18\]](#)

This description is interesting for four reasons. To begin with, Ehrenburg locates the "death factory" not in Maly Trostenets but in the nearby Bolshoi Trostenets – although this error is not a glaring one, considering that the Blagovshchina site is about as far removed from Maly Trostenets as it is from Bolshoi Trostenets, and that the two villages are located very close to each other.

Second, the claim that the buried corpses were disinterred and burned beginning in spring 1944 clashes with later official version, according to which *Sonderkommando* 1005 commenced its activity at Trostenets on 27 October 1943 (see §3.2.4.). Neither does it fit with the witness Lansky's (§2.1.) implication that the operation was begun in January or February 1944 (as this can hardly be called "spring"). One must recall here that burials supposedly took place only at the Blagovshchina site.

Third, the figure of "over 100,000" victims is considerably more conservative than both the 546,000 claimed by the ESC thirteen days previous to Ehrenburg's article, or the later revised ESC figure of 206,500 from 22 September 1944.

Fourth, the improved "gas van" with a tiltable cargo box did not make it into the orthodox historiography on this particular alleged murder weapon (although an isolated mention of it appears in a holocaust anthology originally published in 1983).<sup>[19]</sup> It is not found in any Minsk/Trostenets testimony that I am aware of.

### 3.2.3. Eyewitness Statements on the Mass Graves

As mentioned by Gerlach in the quote above, two of the alleged German perpetrators (G. Heuser and A. Rube) testified that the number of graves had been much smaller: 15 to 18 instead of 34. There are also other witness statements contradicting the findings of the ESC:

- The KdS Minsk member Johann Paul Rumschewitsch, speaking of an alleged mass shooting of Minsk Jews at Blagovshchina in July 1942, testified that the mass graves used on this occasion were approximately 40 meters long, 5 meters wide and 3 meters deep.<sup>[20]</sup>
- The above-mentioned head of KdS Minsk Abteilung I, Georg Heuser, testified about graves "some twenty meters long and at least two meters deep", while acknowledging: "Later we used deeper graves."<sup>[21]</sup>
- The alleged "gas van" driver Johann Haßler, testifying about the killing of some 200 Jews from the Minsk Ghetto, described "a grave measuring about 25 meters in length, 4 meters in width and 2 meters in depth" (implying a density of 1 corpse per cubic meter).<sup>[22]</sup>

Thus, while the ESC supposedly had discovered 34 mass graves, of which 2 were 4.5 meters deep and the rest no less than 5 meters deep, members of the German commando carrying out the alleged mass murders testified to 15 to 18 graves that were some 2 or 3 meters deep.

It is clear that the mass-grave findings of the ESC cannot be accepted as reliable data. The only way to ascertain the number of burial pits at Blagovshchina, their dimensions and the amount of human remains contained in them would be to carry out a full geophysical survey combined with exhumations of the identified grave pits. One may surmise that this will not happen in the near future. In the meantime, it would be of great help if any wartime air photos of the area were discovered.<sup>[23]</sup>

### 3.2.4. The Exhumation and Incineration of Corpses at Blagovshchina

Paul Kohl provides us with the following description of the exhumation and cremation of the victims buried at Blagovshchina, based on testimonies from a West German trial against three former members of the mysterious "Sonderkommando 1005" (Max Krahnert, Otto Goldapp and Otto Drews):

*"At the end of October 1943 Blobel, his adjutant Harder and his 'Sonderkommando 1005' arrived in Minsk, where they were subordinated to the 'Befehlshaber der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD Central Russia and White Russia (BdS)', Erich Ehrlinger. Next they began to 'exhume' all 34 mass graves at Blagovshchina.*

*Blobel immediately continued on to the west [of Belarus] to prepare for operations there, and thus the responsibility for SK 1005 in the Minsk area was initially taken over by Blobel's adjutant Arthur Harder.*

*During the 6 week long exhumation operation at Blagovshchina, which lasted until mid-December 1943, SK 1005 was commanded by in order Arthur Harder (Oct. 27 to Nov. 10, 1943), Dr. Friedrich Seekel (Nov. 11 to Dec. 8, 1943) and Max Krahnner (Dec. 8 to Dec. 15, 1943). Otto Goldapp, an officer from the Schutzpolizei, served as the deputy of Harder, Seekel and Krahnner.*

*Adolf Rube, former inspector of the Minsk ghetto, commanded and supervised the labor force. This consisted of 80 to 100 Soviet prisoners of war. They had their feet chained so that they could just perform their work, but not escape.*

*Whereas Harder, Seekel, Krahnner, Goldapp and Rube lived in houses and the guards in barracks on the estate, the workers were initially transported every morning from Minsk to Blagovshchina and back to Minsk in the evening. Later other prisoners of war had to dig a small, windowless bunker for them, 7 x 18 meter in size, in the ground near the cremation pyres. In this lodging the workers had to spend their nights and 'leisure time'. [...]*

*The work of these Soviet prisoners of war consisted in opening the 34 graves and pulling out the corpses with hooks. As these were already much decayed they fell apart when pulled. The workers had to step into the graves and amidst the terrible stench put the body parts on improvised stretchers. The body parts were then carried out of the graves and put on tall pyres.*

*On an area of 5 by 5 meters the ground was covered with concrete. On this concrete square were placed thick, some one meter high concrete blocks, on top of which railway rails were mounted. By doing so the cremation fire would be sufficiently supplied with air from below. On this grate one placed a layer of logs, followed by a layer of corpses, then again logs, and so on, until the pyre had reached a height of 5 meters. This pile containing some 200 corpses was doused with petrol and then set on fire using burning rags stuck to the end of long rods. It often took two days before such a mountain of corpses had burnt down. The black, sweet-smelling smoke which hung over the site was often so thick that there was hardly any visibility. If the wind was strong the nauseating stench could spread for kilometers. [...]*

*In order to deliver enough firewood all vehicles in the vicinity of Trostenez were commandeered. Each day the local farmers had to fell trees and deliver the logs at the 11 kilometer sign of the Mogilew country road. From this spot a narrow road led to the Blagovshchina Forest. Under supervision the work commandos collected the logs and drove or pulled them to the cremation sites.*

*Although the victims had to hand over all jewelry before they were shot, and although their rings were pulled from their fingers and their gold teeth broken out without anesthesia [from the still-living victims!], one took the precautionary measure of sifting the ashes from the incinerated corpses through large, fine-meshed sieves. Indeed it sometimes happened that one found rings or gold teeth in the corpse ashes. These had to be delivered to Goldapp or Rube. Bones that had not been incinerated were pulverized using mills and mortars and then spread together with the ashes as fertilizer on the fields of the estate. Even the flowerbeds before the houses of the guards were fertilized in this way. [...]*

*By 15 December 1943 all corpses from the 34 pits had been pulled out and burnt."* [\[24\]](#)

The claim that the ashes were spread as fertilizer on nearby fields is contradicted by the testimony of the alleged perpetrator Adolf Rube, who stated that the ashes were thrown back into the opened graves. [\[25\]](#)

Since we are not provided with any information regarding the number of pyres (the witnesses quoted by Kohl speak of pyres in plural form without mentioning numbers) it is impossible to pronounce any verdict on the feasibility of the alleged procedure. We note, however, that it would require a staggering amount of work to complete the cremations within the 50 work days alleged (27 October to 15 December). Given the ESC's victim figure for the Blagovshchina site one would have to exhume and incinerate ( $150,000 \div 50 =$ ) 3000 corpses per day. Assuming instead Gerlach's lower estimate for the same site[26], the daily work load would have to be ( $33,000 \div 50 =$ ) 660 corpses per day.

Kohl states that it "often took two days" for the pyres to burn down. Considering the time it would have taken for the ashes to cool down, and the time it would have taken to remove the ashes and construct a new pyre, it seems reasonable to assume a minimum of 3 days required for the whole cremation procedure. As each pyre is reported to have contained 200 corpses, the daily capacity for one pyre would be ( $200 \div 3 =$ ) 67 corpses. Accordingly one would need either ( $3000 \div 67 =$ ) 48 or ( $660 \div 67 =$ ) 10 pyres in simultaneous use! Then we still haven't considered the climate of Belarus in late winter with rain and snow, or the inevitable warping (due to combined heat and weight) of the railway rails, necessitating reconstruction of the cremation grates.

The amounts of firewood required daily would have staggering, especially considering the claim that the wood was taken from nearby woods and delivered by local farmers for immediate use, which is to say, the wood was fresh (or "green") not seasoned (dried) and thus had a low heating value. To incinerate 1 kilo of human cadaver one needs 3.5 kilo of seasoned wood. If one uses green wood instead, the required amount is almost doubled: the heating value of 1 kilo of dry red pine corresponds to 1.9 kilo of green red pine. In the Koblenz trial verdict Blagovshchina is described as a pine copse, and in the absence of other evidence it seems fair to assume that the surrounding wooded areas were dominated by the same type of tree. Estimating the average weight of the victims to have been 60 kilo, the firewood required to incinerate 1 corpse would have amounted to some 400 kilo. The total daily requirement would have been either approximately ( $400 \times 3000 =$ ) 1,200 tons or ( $400 \times 660 =$ ) 264 metric tons.[27]

### 3.3. The Documentary Evidence

While there exist a large number of (real or purported) documents on shootings of Jews in Belarus, there is only one document (or rather set of documents) that connects Trostenets with mass killings, namely four activity reports (*Tätigkeitsberichte*) supposedly written by a certain SS-Unterscharführer Arlt, commander of "2. Zuges Waffen-SS" of the "1. Komp./Batl. d. Waffen-SS z.b.V." ("z.b.V." is supposed to be read "zur besonderen Verwendung", for special use). While none of the reports mentions Trostenets by name, there is frequent reference to the "Commander's Estate" which is indicated to be near Minsk. Since there is little doubt that at least the majority of the (direct) Jewish transports to Minsk from Central Europe during 1942 were indeed rerouted to Trostenets (cf. §2.3) it is fair to assume that the "Estate" refers to "Gut Trostinez".

Since the Arlt reports are usually reproduced only in part, and since the documentation *Unsere Ehre heisst Treue*,[28] wherein the reports are published in facsimile[29], is not easy to get hold of outside Germany, I will present translations of them in toto in the following section, based on said facsimiles (German spellings of Russian place names, including variants, have been retained).

#### 3.3.1. Translation of the *Gruppe Arlt* Activity Reports



*II. Zug Minsk, 17 May 1942*

*Activity Report*

*The activity of the Zug, i.e. 1 Unterführer and 10 men, consisted, after its departure, at first in leading and supervising the excavation of pits 22 km outside of Minsk. This work lasted eight days and ended with an operation [Aktion] on 30.5.42 [sic], in which the Zug participated in its entirety. (Clearing of the prison.)*

*On 4.5 we continued already with excavating by ourselves new pits in the vicinity of the Commander's Estate. This work also took 4 days.*

*On 11.5 a transport with Jews (1000 units) from Vienna arrived in Minsk and was immediately taken from the railway station to the above-mentioned pit. For this purpose the Zug was deployed directly at the pit.*

*On 13.5, 8 men supervised the digging of another pit, as in the near future [in nächster Zeit] there will once again arrive here a transport with Jews from the Reich.*

*On 16 May myself and nine men accompanied a fur transport of the trading company 'Ost' from Minsk to Unzden and back.*

*At the request of SS-Ostuf. Heuser SS-Rttf. Puck and SS-Strm. Hering were detached to take care of the new house prison [Hausgefängnis].*

*From a unit of the Waffen-SS the SD were transferred a 16-year-old Russian by the name of Lubinski, whom they left to our care. Lubinski is fully equipped and assists us in our task.*

*The SS-Sturm. Hampe took over responsibility for the sanitary station of the commando for three weeks, since Sturmmann Lukas is on furlough.*

*On the order of Ostuf. Störtz SS-Strm. Hanemann was detached to Reval on 18.5.*

*With this I end my current report.*

*Arlt*

*SS-Unterscharführer*

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*II. Zug Waffen-SS Minsk, 16 June 1942*

*Activity Report*

*My last report concluded with the detachment of Hanemann to Reval on 18.5.1942.*

*On 19.5.42 three of our men accompanied a transport of horses and agricultural machines for the Estate of the Commander [of the Security Police, i.e. KdS] from Kobyl, approximately 150 km from here, to Minsk.*

*On 20.5 Oscha. Ponsel and Rttf. Puck marched off in the direction of Loklja. On 20.5 the still remaining men 1:8 supervised the excavation of a pit in the vicinity of the estate.*

*On 21.5 weapons were cleaned and equipment repaired.*

*On 26.5 a transport of 1000 Jews from the Reich arrived in Minsk and was immediately brought to the above-mentioned pit. For this purpose the Waffen-SS were again deployed at the pit.*

*On 27.5 SS-Strm. Otto was admitted to the SS-hospital because of suspected spotted fever. At the present he is still admitted. There is no longer any risk for his life.*

*On 25 and 29.5 another pit was excavated.*

*On 30.5 Reichsminister Rosenberg visited the city of Minsk. The department were responsible for the personal security of the Reichsminister.*

*On 1.6. another transport of Jews arrived here.*

*On 4.6 a large operation against partisans was prepared in Kobil. For that purpose the Gruppe of Uscha. Lipps arrived here from Wilejka.*

*On 5.6 the operation commenced in cooperation with security units [Sicherungseinheiten] with a strength of 300 men. The Waffen-SS were divided into machine gun units [M.G.- Gruppen]. The Gruppen under my command had to secure a 2 km section. Luftwaffe and Wehrmacht combed the partisan area supported by tanks, yet never made any enemy contact. The operation lasted until 8.6.*

*On 9.6 weapons were cleaned and equipment repaired.*

*On 10.6 Gruppe Lipps returned to Wilejka.*

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*On 11.6.42 the Aussenstelle Baranowitsche reported an assault on a 28 men strong commando. 10 Germans and 11 Lithuanians fell victim to this assault. Among them were also SS-Ostuf. Grünzfelder.*

*On the same day a rescue commando consisting of Waffen-SS 1:7 and 45 Unterführern and men from the Sicherheitsdienst headed by the Commander departed for Baranowitsche. In the rescue operation, which commenced on 12.6, there also participated units from the police and gendarmerie with a strength of approx. 200 men. Without incidents we reached the place of the assault, a large village surrounded by woods some 150 km west of Baranowitsche. After investigating and interrogating the inhabitants we pursued for two days, i.e. one afternoon and the following morning, the partisans, who had carried out the assault and thereby captured one lorry and one passenger car, and who reportedly had left two hours prior to our arrival. This [pursuit] was without result, however, as the bandits could not be located.*

*On 13.6 we returned to B.*

*On 14.6 the funeral of the fallen comrades took place in the heroes' cemetery in Baranowitsche, whereby we and Gruppe Lipps participated as honor guard. [Unreadable] we returned to Minsk.*

*On 15.6 there once again arrived here a transport of 1000 Jews from Vienna.*

*On 17.6 the funeral of Ostuf. Burkhardt will take place in the new cemetery at the Commander's Estate.*

\* \* \*

*My Gruppe here in Minsk is now only 1:7 strong. It is at the moment not possible to send even one man on furlough. May I, when the circumstances once more allow it, give annual furloughs [Jahresurlaub], i.e. 21 days? I further request from You to authorize a furlough also for myself. My last furlough was in August 1941. Uscha. Lipps has declared himself ready to substitute for me during this time.*

*Arlt [handwritten signature]*

*Unterscharführer.*

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*Gruppe Arlt Minsk, 3 August 1942*

*Activity Report*

*The work of the men remaining here in Minsk continues very much in the same way as before. The Jewish transports arrive regularly in Minsk and are taken care of by us [von uns betreut].*

*Thus already on 18 and 19.6.42 we were once more occupied with the excavation of pits in the settlement area [Siedlungsgelände]. On 19.6 SS-Scharf. Schröder, who died of spotted fever at the local SS hospital, was buried in the new cemetery at the Commander's Estate. My Gruppe was reinforced by men from the SD and participated as honor guard at the memorial service.*

*On 26.6 the expected Jewish transport from the Reich arrived.*

*On 27.6 we and most of the commando departed for Baranowitsche to participate in an operation. The result was as always negative. In the course of this operation we evacuated [räumten wir] the Jewish ghetto in Slonim. Some 4000 Jews were given over to the earth on this day [an diesem Tage der Erde übergeben].*

*On 30.6 we returned to Minsk. During the next following days we were occupied with repairs to equipment and the cleaning and inspection of weapons.*

*On 2.7 we again carried out the arrangements for the reception of a Jewish transport, [that is, the] excavation of pits.*

*On 10.7 we and the Latvian commando were deployed against the partisans in the Koydanow Forest. In connection with this we unearthed an ammunition depot. On this occasion we were suddenly ambushed with a machine gun. A Latvian comrade was killed. During the pursuit of the band we managed to shoot four men.*

*On 12.7 the Latvian comrade was buried in the new cemetery.*

*On 17.7 a transport of Jews arrived and was brought to the estate.*

*On 21, 22 and 23.7 new pits were excavated.*

*Already on 24.7 another transport with 1000 Jews from the Reich arrived here.*

*From 25.7 to 27.7 new pits were excavated.*

*On 28.7 large operation in the Russian. Ghetto of Minsk. 6,000 Jews were brought to the pits.*

*On 29.7 3000 German Jews were brought to the pits.*

*During the next following days we were again occupied with the cleaning of weapons and the repair of equipment.*

[end of first page]

*Furthermore my Gruppe supplies the NCO of the Watch [U.v.D., Unteroffizier vom Dienst] and supervises the house prison.*

*Inmate strength approximately 50 men.*

*On the orders of SS-Ostuf. Störtz SS-Rttf. Albert Lorenz was relocated to Riga. He was detached on 4.7.42.*

*SS-Rttf. Skowranek and SS-Strm. Auer were on furlough from 8.7 to 1.8. Both returned punctually.*

*SS-Strm. Otto recovered on 28.7 and was released from the hospital, which recommended a recovery furlough. Otto was sent by the Commander on recovery furlough from 3.8 to 25.9. He is planning to get married during this furlough.*

*SS-Strm. Hering is on home furlough from 3.8 to 27.8.*

*The conduct of the men on and off duty is good and leaves no room for any complaints.*

Arlt [handwritten signature]

SS-Unterscharführer

---

Gruppe Arlt Minsk, 25 September 1942

*Activity Report*

*With the exception of two Jewish transports the first half of August passed by rather monotonously.*

*Following 15.8.42 preparations for the large operation against bandits and partisans in the territory of White Russia began. For this purpose various commandos from Riga, Danzig and Posen arrived in Minsk.*

*My Gruppe, i.e. the men Skowranek, Teichmann, Hampe, Auer and myself, was assigned to the clearing commando of Dr. Heuser. Strm. Hering, who returned from furlough on 18.8.42 remained in Minsk substituting armory sergeant [Waffenwart] Gennert.*

*The Heuser Commando, 75 men strong, most of them Latvians, equipped with one heavy as well as one light grenade launcher, one [heavy] machine gun, four light machine guns and submachine guns and carbines set out for Schazk, 75 km from Minsk in the direction of Sluzk. Once arrived we had to clean up the quarters. We were accommodated in a former hospital. From there reconnaissance units were dispatched daily to the surrounding villages. These operations often produced good results. Once we even managed to catch a partisan as he, equipped with carbines and hand grenades, was about to disappear into a forest.*

*On 27.8.42 the whole commando was deployed to a certain place in a marsh where a p.[artisan] camp reportedly was located. The outcome of the operation was negative. After struggling for an hour to get*

*through the forest we reached a slough where it was impossible for us to go any further. After firing the grenade launcher indiscriminately into the slough for 15 minutes we withdrew. A night operation carried out one day later was also without result, as the partisans present in the village had hidden themselves so well that we could not find them. The village teacher, who sought to escape after being interrogated, was shot on the run by Strm. Hampe.*

[end of first page]

*On 31.8.42, towards 5:00 p.m. a report arrived from a village 10 km from Schazk concerning a 3 men strong p.[artisan] group which came there to pick up provisions. Two passenger cars were immediately made ready and drove off. After reaching the edge of the village half an hour later, we advanced while securing the area to the left and right, when the right patrol, Strm. Auer and I, noticed a man who we first believed to be a farmer. When Strm. Auer called out to the same man, who had come within a distance of some 15 meters, he was shot at from close range by a submachine gun shooter lying in cover [Deckung, here misspelled as Dekung], while I was shot at by a rifle shooter. We threw ourselves down, took cover and immediately opened fire, whereupon the partisans immediately retreated through a wheatfield, pausing occasionally to shoot back at us. In the meantime Ostuf. Heuser, Hampe, Teichmann and Skowranek with the machine gun as well as Gennert and Exner arrived and immediately joined in the combat. During the engagement, which lasted for 17 minutes, one p.[artisan] was shot, while the other two managed to escape into the nearby bush forest, apparently wounded. There were no casualties on our side, neither wounded nor dead. As was determined by the 1st SS-Brigade on the following day, there existed in the same forest at a distance of 1 km a camp consisting of approx. 30 men. During the engagement a woman working on a field nearby was wounded.*

*After some more patrols crisscrossing the region around Schazk we left the follow-up to the units of the 1st SS-Brigade deployed there, and on 4.9.42 we set off in the direction of Byten, approx. 140 km from Brest-Litovsk. We arrived there the same day via Baranowitsche and installed ourselves in a school. On the same day at 9.00 in the evening a part of the locality situated near a forest was attacked by partisans and eight houses were set on fire. The Lithuanian machine gun post which had been set up to protect the locality returned the fire.*

*The following days passed by quietly. Weapons were cleaned, interrogations and smaller reconnaissance patrols carried out.*

*On 8.9.2 we continued on to Nihatschewo, located 130 km from Brest along the road. There we found quarters prepared. On the next day we advanced*

[end of second page]

*together with units from the 1st SS-Brigade towards the reportedly partisan-controlled small town of Kossow, 12 km north of Nihatschewo. The partisans had retreated and doing so burned down more than 40 houses. The population was interrogated and twelve suspicious persons were handed over to the brigade's I.o. [intelligence officer]. In the evening we returned to our quarters in Nihatschewo. The next days passed by quietly and without any operations.*

*On 12.9.42 we returned to our old quarters in Byten.*

*On 13.9.42, around 1:00 p.m., a convoy of five vehicles which was to meet with us in Byten was attacked by partisans 6 km from the locality. Scharf. Tietz, who rode in the first car, was immediately hit by a fatal shot and died. The driver of the car, Hptscharf. Jenner, was wounded in both hands. The mechanic sitting in the same car, a Jew, transferred Jenner into a lorry, which he then drove to our office in Byten. Strm. Hampe administered first aid to the wounded. A 40 man strong rescue commando immediately made its way to the site of the assault. Around the same time there arrived two Gruppe from the mot.[orized] gendarmerie in Mironím, which had been called to the site by the driver in the last car. Some of them remained standing around the last car, looking for bullet holes. Blinded by the sun and believing that we had in front of us partisans plundering the car we opened fire. The gend.[arms] took cover and returned the fire. After five minutes the mistake was discovered and fire was ceased. There were no losses. The dead were brought back to Byten and laid in state. The vehicles were towed away. Once arrived in Byten we discovered that one of the men from our commando, Uscha. Kirchner, was missing. Search operations immediately commenced but rendered no results. A search operation carried out on the following day was likewise without any result. According to statements from a farmer who lived nearby, Kirchner had left on his own to capture partisans. According to statements from captured partisans Kirchner was burned alive.*

*The next days passed by quietly except for a few courier trips to Baranowitsche.*

*On 22.9.42 we departed for Minsk via Baranowitsche and arrived around 9:00 in the evening.*

[end of third page]

*On 23.9.42 the dead comrades from Hauptstuf. Liebram's commando were buried in the heroes' cemetery on the estate. Gauleiter Kube, as well as the Gend.[armerie]Führer of White Russia were present.*

*On 25.9.42 there again arrived a transport with Jews.*

*The SS-Sturmmänner Auer, Otto and Hering were promoted to SS-Rottenführern with effect from 15.9.42.*

*I have been granted furlough from 25.9 to 20.10.42 and have appointed SS-Rttf. Auer to be my substitute. During the same period the Sturmmänner Hampe and Wyngra will also be on furlough. SS-Strm. Teichmann has been on furlough since 5.9.42 and will return on 28.9.42. SS-Rttf. Otto reported back from furlough on 25.9.42.*

*The Borgward lorry, which is at present in the Army motor pool [H.K.P, Heereskraftpark] has been made ready and will be picked up by Uscha. Bartz.*

*sg.*

*Arlt [typewritten]*

*SS-Unterscharführer*

*att. [f.d.R., für die Richtigkeit]*

*Auer [handwritten signature]*

*SS-Rottenführer*

### 3.3.2. The Provenance of the Documents and Their Characteristics

In the 1965 documentation *Unsere Ehre heisst Treue*, which is the source for the Arlt reports given by both Gerlach and Kohl, we are informed that the war diaries and activity reports of the 1st Company of the Waffen SS special-forces battalion were among "new material recently discovered" at the Czechoslovakian State Archives in Castle Zásmyky, Kolin.<sup>[30]</sup> The editor(s) provides no explanation as to how these documents were discovered, by whom, or the reason for their presence in the Czechoslovakian archives. Later the reports were evidently copied and incorporated into the archival collections of the *Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen* in Ludwigsburg (ZStL).<sup>[31]</sup> The "recent" discovery of the reports most likely took place after 1963, because they were clearly not introduced as evidence at the Koblenz trial. There is no mention in *Unsere Ehre heisst Treue* of the documents ever being authenticated, and I have found no indication that Arlt himself survived the war, or that in such case he was confronted with the documents.

The report from 17 May 1942 is typed on one page. The word *Gruben* (pits) on its third line appears to have originally been misspelled *Gruppen* (groups) and then corrected using a relatively thick pen.

The report from 16 June 1942 is typed on two pages. It is either written on a typewriter with worn-out letters or is a carbon copy (although if so it is not indicated). The second page is paginated using Arabic numerals.

The report from 3 August 1942 is typed on two pages, with the second page considerably less clearly readable than the first (possibly the ribbon began to wear out). There are seven corrections made with a not-so-fine pen: on 5 occasions on the lower half of the first page the author has written a "6" indicating June and then corrected it to "7" (for July).

The report from 25 September 1942 is typed on four pages (paginated using Roman numerals). It contains 9 handwritten corrections of spelling errors made using the same or a similar pen as in the 3 August report and the 17 May report.

The most striking feature common to all of the four reports is that they are lacking an addressee. Who was the recipient of the report? The reader has no way of knowing. The only heading provided is the name of Arlt's unit, the place and date, and the word "activity report" (Tätigkeitsbericht). In contrast to this we have reproduced in the same documentation<sup>[32]</sup> an activity report written by SS-*Unterscharführer* Lipps (who also appears in the Arlt report of 16 June). It is dated 27 May 1942 at the *Aussenstelle Wilejka*, typewritten, neatly paginated (in Arabic numerals) and states as its addressee a certain SS-*Untersturmführer* Burgdorf stationed in Minsk (cf. Ill. 3). The Lipps activity report mentions four operations against Jews ("*Judenaktion*") – in Krzywice on 28 April, in Dolhinov on 29-30 April, in Wolozyn on 10 May and again in Dolhinov on 21 May. As for the last operation we learn that thereby "the Jewish problem in this town was solved with finality", but aside from this possible veiled reference there are no mentions of mass killings in the report, explicit or implicit. There are another two messages from Lipps that are handwritten in Sütterlin script, both signed by Lipps himself and addressed to the aforementioned Burgdorf.<sup>[33]</sup> As the first message, which has the form of an activity report but lacks a title, covers one and a half page, with the short second message following on the bottom of the second page, it seems likely that these are drafts that were to be typewritten before being dispatched (if the two messages were part of the same letter it would make little sense to address and sign both of them as though they were separate letters).

Arlt's form of signature also varies from report to report. On the 17 May report we have a tiny, almost unreadable handwritten signature (presumably "Arlt") under which is typewritten "*SS-Unterscharführer*" (using the SS-rune). On the 16 June report we have a handwritten signature ("Arlt") of about the same size, clearer now, under which is typewritten "*Unterscharführer*" followed by a typed period (full stop). No "SS", either typed with the special rune or with ordinary letters, can be seen preceding the word "*Unterscharführer*", but there is a small dot just to the left of the "U" which might possibly be the right end of a hyphen connecting a missing "SS" with "*Unterscharführer*". On the 3 August report we have a somewhat larger handwritten signature ("Arlt") under which is typewritten "*SS-Unterscharführer*" using the SS-rune, followed by a typed period. On the 25 September report, finally, the signature is for the first time preceded by the abbreviation "[g]ez." (*gezeichnet*, signed; the "g" is not visible, likely due to a problem with the typewriter). The signature itself is typewritten ("Arlt"). Under this is typewritten "*SS-Unterscharführer*" sans concluding period. We also have here to the lower left a note of attestation signed *SS-Rottenführer Auer*, who was to substitute for Arlt during the latter's furlough. For a facsimile see Ill. 5.

A comparison of the three handwritten signatures (cf. Ill. 4) further shows that the "A" and the "t" in the 3 August report look radically different from the corresponding letters in the two other handwritten signatures.



0070

II. Zug

Minsk, den 17. Mai 1942

Tätigkeitsbericht.

Die Tätigkeit des Zuges d.h. 1 Unterführer und 10 Mann, bestand, nachdem Sie abgereist waren zunächst darin, die Aushebung von Gruben, 22 km vor Minsk zu leiten bzw. zu beaufsichtigen. Die Arbeiten dauerten acht Tage und endeten mit einer Aktion am 30.5.42, an der der gesamte Zug teilnahm. (Ausräumung des Gefängnisses.)<sup>o</sup>

Am 4.5. gingen wir bereits wieder daran neue Gruben, in der Nähe des Gutes vom Kdr., selbst auszuheben. Auch diese Arbeiten nahmen 4 Tage in Anspruch.

Am 11.5. traf ein Transport mit Juden (1000 Stück) aus Wien in Minsk ein, und wurden gleich vom Bahnhof zur obengenannten Grube geschafft. Dazu war der Zug direkt an der Grube eingesetzt.

Am 13.5. beaufsichtigten 8 Mann die Ausgrabung einer weiteren Grube, da in nächster Zeit abermals ein Transport mit Juden aus dem Reich, hier eintreffen soll.

Am 16.5. begleiteten ich mit neun Mann einen Felltransport der Handelsgesellschaft "Ost", von Minsk nach Unzen und zurück. Der ~~W~~Rttf. P u c k und der ~~W~~Strm. H e r i n g, wurden auf Ersuchen von ~~W~~Ostuf. H e u s e r, zur Betreuung des neuen Hausgefängnisses abkommandiert.

Der S.D. übernahm von einer Einheit der Waffen~~W~~ einen 16 jährigen Russen mit Namen L u b i n s k i und übergab ihn uns zur Betreuung. Lubiski ist völlig ausgerüstet und versieht mit uns den Dienst.

Der ~~W~~Strm. H a m p e, übernahm für drei Wochen die Sanitätsstelle des Kommandos, da Strm. Lukas sich auf Urlaub befindet.

~~W~~Strm. H a n e m a n n, wird am 18.5. auf Befehl von Ostuf. Störz nach Reval in Marsch gesetzt.

Damit endet mein heutiger Bericht.

~~W~~Unterscharführer.

*Illustration 2. Arlt's Report from 17 May 1942 (Source: Unsere Ehre heisst Treue, p. 236).*

Tätigkeitsbericht  
von SS-Untersturmführer Lipps  
Aussenstelle Wilejka.

0071

Wilejka, 27.5.42

12

An

SS-Untersturmführer Burgdorf

M i n s k .

Die Tätigkeit der Gruppe der Waffen-SS erstreckt sich immer noch auf Aktionen gegen Partisanen und Juden. Die Tage, an denen wir nicht ausrücken, werden durch mannigfachen Arbeitsdienst ausgefüllt. Dazu gehören Waffenreinigen, Kleider-instandsetzen usw. Auch landwirtschaftliche Arbeiten werden von unseren Männern ausgeführt, soweit solche bei unserem Kommando nötig sind. Auf dem Gelände der Aussenstelle Wilejka wurden Hafer und Kartoffeln angebaut. Die Arbeiten selbst werden zwar grösstenteils von Häftlingen ausgeführt doch müssen diese bewacht und die Arbeiten von SS-Männern, welche zuhause Landwirte sind, fachmännisch geleitet werden. Vorkommnisse, welche zu beanstanden wären, gab es in den letzten Wochen innerhalb der SS-Gruppe keine. SS-Mann Geiss kommt am 31. Mai vom Urlaub zurück. Mit SS-Mann Geiss ist der letzte Mann der hiesigen Gruppe in Urlaub gefahren, der zu Weihnachten nicht zuhause war. Da die Angehörigen vom SD z. Zt. in Urlaub fahren, sind auch SS-Männer wegen Urlaub an mich herangetreten. Ich habe dies abgelehnt mit dem Hinweis, dass ich dafür nicht zuständig bin und ihre Entscheidung abwarten müsste....

Bei Aktionen gegen Partisanen und Juden war unsere Gruppe wiederholt eingesetzt. Die alarmierenden Berichte über Partisanen erwiesen sich meist als übertrieben. Oft war es ein blinder Alarm. So waren unsere Erfolge auf diesem Gebiete nicht sehr gross. Am 20. April waren wir in Rabun, wo wie Kriegsgefangene, die partisanenverdächtig waren, sicherstellten. - Rabun liegt etwa 15 km ostwärts Wilejka. -

Am 26. April wurden wir auf die Fuchsfarm Ludwinowo gerufen. Der auf der Farm tätige Sonderführer Graf war von den Partisanen ermordert worden. Die Holzbrücke über den Serwecz in der Nähe von Ludwinowo war abgebrannt. Von den Partisanen fanden wir nichts

Illustration 3. The First Page of the Gruppe Lipps Report from 27 May 1942 (Source: Ibid., p. 237).

*Lipps*  
\*Unterscharführer.

17 May Report

*Arlt.*  
\*Unterscharführer.

16 June Report

*Arlt*  
\*Unterscharführer.

3 August Report

Illustration 4. The Handwritten Signatures from the First Three Arlt Reports.

IV.

0099

Am 23.9.42. fand auf dem Heldenfriedhofe am Gut die Beisetzung der toten Kameraden vom Kommando Hauptstuf. Liebratstatt, Gauleiterkuche, sowie der GenD. Führer von Weißbrunnen wären anwesend.

Am 25.9.42. trifft wieder ein Transport Juden hier ein.

Die Sturmmänner Auer, Otto und Herzig, wurden mit Wirkung vom 15.9.42. zum Rottenführer ernannt.

Ich bin für die Zeit vom 25.9. bis 20.10.42. beurlaubt und habe den Rotf. Auer, zu meinem Stellvertreter bestimmt. Für die gleiche Zeit befinden sich auch die Stmm. Hampel und Wyriga, im Urlaub. Der Stmm. Reichmann befindet sich seit dem 5.9.42. im Urlaub und kommt am 28.9.42. wieder zurück. Der Rotf. Otto, meldete sich am 25.9.42. vom Urlaub zurück.

Der LKW Borgward, der sich im H.K.F. in Lidia befindet, ist fertiggestellt und wird von Hscha. Bartz abgeholt.

ez.

Arlt

Unterscharführer

f.d.R.

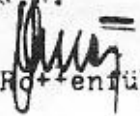
  
Rottenführer.

Illustration 5. The Last Page of the 25 September 1942 Arlt Report.

### 3.3.3. Problematic Content

The Arlt activity reports mention, besides one mass killing of 4,000 Jews in Slonim, a total of 14 massacres of Jews near the "Commander's Estate". I have summarized the details regarding these 14 mass killings in the table below:

**Table 4: Killings at Trostenets mentioned by the *Gruppe Arlt* activity reports.**

Date	Number of Victims	Source
30 April	?	Prisoners
11 May	1000	Vienna
26 May	1000	Reich
1 June	?	?
15 June	1000	Vienna
26 June	?	Reich
17 July	?	?
24 July	1000	Reich
28 July	6000	Minsk Russian Ghetto
29 July	3000	Minsk Russian Ghetto
1-15 August	?	?
1-15 August	?	?
25 September	?	?

(a) The Liquidation of the Slonim Ghetto

In the report from 3 August 1942 we read that *Gruppe Arlt* departed for Baranovichi on 27 June to participate in an operation, and that during the course of this operation it evacuated the Slonim Ghetto. We further read that "on this day" some 4,000 Slonim Jews were killed. Any reader would take it that the mass killing in question was carried out on 27 June, as no other date is mentioned, but all other available sources state that the liquidation of the Slonim Ghetto began on 29 June. Since we learn in the same report that *Gruppe Arlt* returned to Minsk on 30 June, it is possible to argue that the unit was indeed active in Slonim on 29 June, the day before its return to base, and that Arlt simply forgot to mention the actual date of the massacre. The official historiography on the Slonim Ghetto liquidation, however, offers a further contradiction.

Yitzhak Arad describes the events as follows:

*"The annihilation of Jews in the Slonim ghetto, which housed 10,000 to 12,000 Jews, including several thousand from neighboring townships, took place between June 29 and July 15 [1942]. Prior to the murder action, in May, 500 Jewish men had been sent to work in the east Belarusian town of Mogilev, where no Jews existed. On June 29 at dawn, the ghetto was surrounded by local police reinforced by a unit of Lithuanian police. The ghetto inhabitants hurried into their hiding places; on the first day of the action, some 2,000 Jews were caught and taken 7 kilometers east of the city, to Petrolevich, where they were shot. Many Jews were killed when hand grenades were thrown into their hiding places, and many more were shot trying to escape. The massacre and the manhunts continued until July 15. Between 8,000*

and 10,000 Jews were murdered in Slonim. When the action was over, fewer than 1,000 Jews remained; most of these were artisans. About 400 of them were murdered on August 20, and a few hundred more escaped to the forest. The last Jews in Slonim were shot in December 1942." [34]

Thus if we are to believe Arlt, Arlt and his unit could only have participated in the murder of some 2,000 Jews, i.e. half the number recorded in the 3 August report.

According to the above-mentioned letter from Kube to Lohse on 31 July 1942 (3428-PS) 8,000 Jews were liquidated in Slonim.

Interestingly, the verdict of the 1963 Koblenz trial found that Heuser's KdS commando had carried out the killing of 200 Jews from the Slonim ghetto "possibly in April, though probably in May or the beginning of June 1942" near a quarry 1-2 km outside of the town; the verdict did not state whether this number was included in the 8,000 figure mentioned in the Kube letter. [35] As far as I have been able to determine no other source mentions this alleged massacre.

#### (b) The Arrival Date of Transport Da 203

According to both the *Fahrplananordnung* Nr 12 of the *Deutsche Reichsbahn Reichsbahndirektion Königsberg* from 7 May 1942 and the *Fahrplananordnung* Nr 40 from *Hauptseisenbahndirektion Mitte* (Minsk) from 13 May 1942, the transport Da 203 from Vienna was scheduled to arrive in Minsk on 22 May 1942 (a Saturday). [36] On 22 May 1942 Georg Heuser and *SS-Obersturmführer* Lütkenhus met with Reichsbahn officials to negotiate new arrival dates for the transports. On the following day, 23 May, Heuser dispatched a telegram to *Reichsbahnoberrat* Reichardt summarizing the results of their meeting. [37] In this we read that "the transport expected here on the Saturday before Whitsuntide [*Pfingsten*] is to be halted in Koydanoff, so that it arrives in Minsk only on the night of Tuesday after Whitsuntide". The *Reichsbahn* also promised to insert corresponding delays to all further transports, so that they would arrive in Minsk "on the night of a Monday or another weekday, with the exception of Friday".

In 1942 Whitsuntide fell between 22 and 25 May. [38] The first Tuesday following Whitsuntide was 26 May. Accordingly the Koblenz court ruled that Da 203 had arrived in Minsk on that day (cf. §2.3.). This also fits with the Arlt report from 16 June. There appears, however, to exist some doubt regarding the arrival date of Da 203. Gerlach lists it as arriving on 23 May, and then lists separately a transport arriving on 26 May, with the Arlt report as the only source, concluding that "because of the great difference in time there can be no confusion with the preceding or following transports". [39] In the Arlt report in question there is no mention of a transport arriving on 23 May, despite the fact that it strongly implies that Arlt and his men were in the Minsk area on that day without any other business to attend to. As sources on the arrival of Da 203 Gerlach lists a "Note of the KdS White Russia concerning alterations" (*Vermerk KdS Weissruthenien über Änderungen*) dated 23 May 1942, likely the same as the Heuser telegram quoted above, but also "Information on arrived deportation trains" ("*Angaben über eingelaufene Deportations-Züge*") from the Minsk State Archives. [40] Although I have not been able to access the latter document, I find it reasonable to assume that it does indeed confirm a 23 May arrival – else Gerlach must have committed a rather remarkable blunder. Could it be that the train was not delayed as planned until the 26th, but that its arrival was only postponed for one day, until May 23?

#### (c) The Arrival Date of Transport Da 206

According to the Koblenz trial verdict Transport Da 206 arrived in Minsk on 15 June 1942, which fits with the 16 June Arlt report's statement that a transport arrived in Minsk on the 15th. Gerlach, however, gives the arrival date as 13 June, even though he references the Arlt report. His other source is a preserved transport list.<sup>[41]</sup> The transport departed Vienna on 9 June 1942.

#### (d) The Arrival Date of Transport Da 220

According to a list of arrived transports from the Minsk State Archives referenced by Gerlach, Transport Da 220, departing from Theresienstadt on 14 July, arrived in Minsk on 18 July.<sup>[42]</sup> The Arlt report of 3 August, however, does not list any arrival on this date, but instead it speaks of "a transport of Jews" arriving on the 17th. Gerlach notes this contradiction and gives as arrival date "17 or 18 July". Kohl also notes the contradiction and inserts a note within brackets: "18.7.?"<sup>[43]</sup>

#### (e) The Two Transports in the First Half of August

In the Arlt report from 25 September we read that two Jewish transports arrived on unstated dates during the first half of August 1942. There is however only one known transport to Minsk/Trostenets during this period: Transport Da 222, which departed Theresienstadt on 4 August. Where then did the other transport come from? Gerlach makes a faint attempt at explaining it as the transport of 1000 Polish Jews from Warsaw mentioned in correspondence between Kube and Lohse, but since this train arrived in Minsk not in August but on 31 July, Gerlach leaves the possibility open for the arrival of an undocumented transport of unknown origin.<sup>[44]</sup>

#### (f) *Zug* versus *Gruppe*

In the Waffen-SS a *Zug* (pl. *Züge*) was the tactical equivalent of a platoon and had 30 to 40 men in its ranks. *Gruppe* (group, squad) was the term for the smallest sub-unit of the German military and as a norm consisted of 8-10 men. Usually a *Gruppe* was a component of a *Zug*.<sup>[45]</sup> Yet at the very beginning of the 17 May report Arlt writes: "The activity of the *Zug*, i.e. 1 Unterführer and 10 men" ("*Die Tätigkeit des Zuges d.h. 1 Unterführer und 10 Mann*"). Then at the end of the 16 June report we read: "My *Gruppe* here in Minsk is now only 1:7 strong" ("*Meine Gruppe hier in Minsk ist nur mehr 1:7 stark*"), i.e. there were only 1 Unterführer (Arlt himself) and 7 men (Sturmmänner and Rottenführern) left in the *Gruppe*. This is congruent with the statements that Strm. Lukas was on furlough, Rttf. Puck detached to Loklja, and Strm. Otto in the hospital with spotted fever. This clearly shows that Arlt (or a possible forger) confuses *Zug* with *Gruppe* at the beginning of the 17 May report.

There is also the curious renaming in the report headers of Arlt's unit from "II. *Zug* Waffen-SS" (in the 17 May report only "II. *Zug*") to "*Gruppe* Arlt". How come that Arlt was reporting for the 2nd *Zug* when from the beginning he had only 10 men with him? Note that this renaming isn't explained, even though reports from 16 June and 3 August (between which it occurred) are consecutive. Also note that Arlt continues to use the term *Zug* for his *Gruppe* throughout the 17 May report. It seems odd, to say the least, that a unit commander would misuse such basic terms.

#### (g) The Location of the Mass Graves

In the 17 May report Arlt writes that he and his unit spent 8 days "leading and supervising the excavation of pits 22 km outside of Minsk" ("*die Aushebung von Gruben, 22 km vor Minsk zu leiten bzw. zu beaufsichtigen*"). The wartime *Übersichtskarte von Mitteleuropa* makes it clear, however, that



Trostenets and Blagovshchina were located approximately 12 and 14 km respectively outside of the city of Minsk (cf. Ill. 1). Kohl has chosen to excise "22 km vor Minsk" from his transcript of the report without notifying his readers.<sup>[46]</sup> The date of the clearing of the prison is chronologically inconsistent with the dating of the report, although this may be explained by a simple mistake (Arlt typing a "5" instead of a "4"). The operation would in that case have taken place on 30 April (I have indicated thus in Table 4 above).

#### **3.3.4. The Evidentiary Value of the Reports**

Although the above listed anomalies and problems pertaining to provenance, document characteristics and contents may not be sufficient to brand the Arlt reports as forgeries, they constitute a number of good reasons to be skeptical of its authenticity. Moreover, even if it was 100% genuine, the killings mentioned or implied in them would cover only some half of Gerlach's minimum figure of 40,000 Trostenets victims. Except for the killings of Jews from the Minsk Ghetto on 28-29 July 1942 and the Slonim Ghetto liquidation, which are corroborated (more or less) by 3428-PS, there exists, as far as I have been able to determine, no documentary evidence corroborating the other mass killings mentioned by the reports, unless we count the 15 June 1942 "gas van" telegram (see the following paragraph) which does not mention Trostenets and only speaks of "special treatment" (*Sonderbehandlung*). Most importantly, there exists no reliable forensic evidence for any of the mass murders.

It is worth noting that while the Arlt reports describe anti-partisan operations in great detail, their descriptions of the handling of Jewish transports are terse in the extreme. Thus while we are provided with information such as that Heuser's commando was equipped with "one light grenade launcher, one [heavy] machine gun, four light machine guns and submachine guns and carbines" during the anti-partisan operation in mid-August,

- There is no description of the modus operandi of the mass killings, nor is there any mention of which officers were in charge of them
- There is no mention of the "gas vans" allegedly employed at Trostenets
- There is no mention of the fact that some of the arrivals were selected for work at the estate
- There is no mention of the change in the arrival procedure which took place in early August (from indirect transports via the Minsk freight station to direct arrivals via the new railway line).

In his 2003 transcript of the reports Paul Kohl has left out most of the descriptions of anti-partisan operations (including a full two pages from the 25 September report) without even marking these omissions with ellipses.

One might argue that a hypothetical forger would not include long detailed descriptions, such as the passages concerning anti-partisan operations. This possible argument, however, does not take into consideration that the forger may have used authentic activity reports as a basis for his work and simply altered or added text. The forger would of course be wise to exercise caution when making his own additions and refrain from giving too many verifiable details – something which could explain the above-mentioned terseness of the description of the mass killings. The odd lack of an addressee could also be

explained from the viewpoint of a forger, as a measure to prevent any search for copies or corresponding report summaries.

Hopefully future research will throw more light on the background and the contents of the Arlt reports. Until then the most reasonable assessment is to consider their evidentiary quality questionable.

### 3.4. The "Gas Vans" Allegedly Deployed at Trostenets

I will not discuss here in detail the so-called "gas vans", as this aspect of the holocaust has been critically examined at length elsewhere.<sup>[47]</sup> I will here confine myself to pointing out a few oddities and contradictions pertaining to the alleged use of "gas vans" at Maly Trostenets.

In one of the handful of documents used by exterminationists to prove the existence of "gas vans", a telegram from the Reichskommissariat Ostland head of the SIPO and SD in Riga to RSHA headquarters in Berlin dated 15 June 1942 we read the following:

*"At the commander of the SIPO and SD White Russia a transport of Jews arrives weekly which is to be subjected to special treatment [Sonderbehandlung].—*

*The 3 S–wagons existing there do not suffice for this purpose. I request for allocation of another S–wagon (5[t] tonner). Furthermore I request at once to send 20 exhaust hoses for the existing 3 S–wagons (2 Diamond, 1 Saurer), as those available are already leaky."*<sup>[48]</sup>

From an exterminationist point of view this can only refer to the handling of the Jewish convoys arriving in Minsk in the summer of 1942 that were allegedly exterminated in "gas vans" and then interred at the Blagovshchina site. Of course, even if accepted as genuine – and there are several question marks surrounding this and the associated telegrams collected in the Nuremberg file 501-PS<sup>[49]</sup> – its homidical interpretation hinges on the interpretation that the term "*Sonderbehandlung*" ("special treatment") equals physical extermination.

Considering, however, that the weekly direct Jewish transports to Minsk and Trostenets almost invariably consisted of 1,000 people, of whom some died en route and 20-80 were selected for work at Minsk or Trostenets, leaving some 950 to be killed, and considering that the majority of the victims buried at Blagovshchina are claimed to have been shot, not gassed, then the demand for a fourth "gas van" appears rather odd, especially if one draws a comparison to the "extermination camp" Chelmno, where in March 1942 alone a total of 24,687 Jews, i.e. 797 per day, are alleged to have been murdered exclusively through the use of merely 2 or 3 "gas vans". In comparison the three vans allegedly employed at Trostenets prior to 15 June 1942 each had to handle some 317 victims per week, at the very most.<sup>[50]</sup>

According to a draft for an outgoing telegram allegedly sent to Riga on 22 June 1942 in response to the above discussed request, a 5-ton Saurer "S-wagon" was scheduled to be dispatched to the SIPO and SD White Russia in the following month, i.e. July 1942.<sup>[51]</sup> In a statement left in the early 1960s the above-mentioned "gas van" driver Johann Haßler claims that 4 gas vans were employed by the KdS and the Einsatzkommandos operating in and around Minsk. This would seem to fit with the contents of the two telegrams. Haßler, however, testified that he himself had driven a 3-ton Diamond, and that this had a capacity of 25 victims per loading, yet he goes on to describe all four vans employed as having the same capacity,<sup>[52]</sup> despite the general contention that the larger Saurer vans had about twice the capacity of

the Diamond vans. How come Haßler did not recall this (supposedly) basic fact? [\[53\]](#) After all, pointing this out would not have been incriminating to himself, as he claimed to have driven the smaller type of vehicle.

#### **4. What Was the Function of the Camp at Maly Trostenets?**

As seen above, it is nowadays commonly asserted that the Austrian, German and Czech Jews deported to Belarus in the period May-November 1942 constituted some 35-50% of the total number of Trostenets victims, and that the camp did not serve primarily as an extermination center for the Belarusian Jews. It is also asserted by Gerlach and others that the opening of the camp more or less coincided with the first of the 1942 transports from the above-mentioned countries. All this suggests that Trostenets had two functions: 1) as a minor agricultural labor camp; 2) as a center for the handling of Jewish convoys from the west.

##### **4.1. The Alleged Mass Killings as Chronological Anomaly**

What then was the fate of these transports? If we are to accept mainstream historiography the vast majority of the deportees were immediately murdered by gas or bullets at the Blagovshchina site. The foremost evidence for this contention are the questionable Arlt activity reports, which, even if authentic, mention only ten, or less than half, of the transports. Aside from this we only have Strauch's sworn statement that Heydrich had ordered the killing of the transports in April 1942.

What certainly puts the mass extermination claim in spurious light is the dates of the transports. The first convoy allegedly exterminated at Trostenets departed from Vienna on 6 May 1942. By this point in time three "extermination camps" – Auschwitz-Birkenau, Chełmno and Bełżec – were already in operation in Poland, and a fourth, Sobibór, was just about to open. In late July 1942 all six of the "extermination camps" were active. But if these camps really were sites of industrialized mass murder, why send 16-30 convoys with Jews from the west all the way to Belarus, when they could be sent half the distance or less to be killed in Poland? The only logical conclusions from this seems to be: a) the RSHA were completely incompetent as far as logistics are concerned; b) the KdS Minsk had the Jews deported to Maly Trostenets killed on the initiative of Heydrich and/or Himmler, who for some reason sought to keep the killings of these transports secret from the one who had ordered them, i.e. Hitler; or c) the deported Jews, or at least part of them, were indeed resettled to other locations in the Minsk region. If we are to believe holocaust historians like Gerlach, all authorities in Minsk were aware of the mass murders carried out at Trostenets [\[54\]](#), so that it seems completely implausible that the operation could have been kept hidden by Himmler and Heydrich. This would leave only alternatives A and C. Exterminationists, of course, have no problem engaging in "double-think" and may simultaneously believe that the alleged perpetrators of the mass killings were bumbling fools and cold-blooded, efficient bureaucrats. What then about alternative C?

##### **4.2. Maly Trostenets as Possible Transit Camp**

Is it possible that the "resettlement" of the Jews arriving at Trostenets indeed meant resettlement? According to the witness Hans Munz, who was deported from Theresienstadt in June 1942, the arrivals at Trostenets were told that they would be brought to new workplaces. [\[55\]](#) In the testimony of "an unknown deportee from Vienna" we read that the deportees remaining at Trostenets were told that

their relatives who had arrived with them "were brought to other estates, of which there were many in the vicinity".<sup>[56]</sup> The anonymous testimony continues:

"In the meantime we had learnt that there were no 'other estates [*anderen Güter*]' in the vicinity of Minsk, and that all the people, who they [the Germans] told us were sent to 'other estates' were brought to 'Estate 16'. This 'Estate 16' was located some 4-5 kilometers from Klein-Trostenez, on the left side of the road to Mogilev. On that site thousands were shot and murdered in gas vans. Labor commandos from our camp were often dispatched to the woods near this '*Gut 16*'. On their way they met grey vans [*Kastenwagen*] and open trucks driving in that direction. The lorries were loaded full with people. At one time I even saw a corpse lying on the road, dressed only in underpants. Apparently he had jumped off the truck in order to save himself and had then been shot by the guards accompanying the transport."<sup>[57]</sup>

The assertion that there did not exist any other estates in the Minsk region is clearly false.

In *Generalkommissariat Weissruthenien* there existed, according to Gerlach, no fewer than 967 state-owned farms (*Sovkhoz*es) with a total area of 350,000 hectares, corresponding to some 12 percent of the arable land.<sup>[58]</sup> Several hundred new farms were established by the economic administration of the Generalkommissariat Weissruthenien in 1942.<sup>[59]</sup> In addition there existed in White Russia some 1400 collective-owned farms, *Kolkhoz*es (which were later split up by the Germans into 5300 *Landbaugenossenschaften*).<sup>[60]</sup> The SS and Police in White Russia operated at least 16 *Staatsgüter* (state-owned farms).<sup>[61]</sup> Among these were Trostenets, Koldichevo (also spelled Koldyczewo, also spelled Koldyczewo, near Baranovici), Drosdy and Vishnevka.<sup>[62]</sup> Considering that *GK Weissruthenien* covered an area of approximately 70,000 km<sup>2</sup>, whereof the Minsk-Land area made up some 12 percent, it stands to reason that a fair number of collective farms must have existed within, say, a 50 km radius of Trostenets. Gerlach further informs us that the production of the *Sovkhoz*es during the German occupation was hampered by an extreme lack of manpower.<sup>[63]</sup> The utilization of the arriving Jews as slave labor on farms in the Minsk area would thus hardly be unthinkable.

The most glaringly unrealistic element to appear in the testimonies and literature concerning Trostenets is the repeated mention of the arrival of Jewish convoys that shouldn't exist according to mainstream historiography – convoys of French, Dutch and Polish Jews which if they in fact reached Trostenets almost certainly must have done so via the "extermination camps". We are thus speaking here of Jews counted as "gassed" by the exterminationists.

As already mentioned, the Trostenets eyewitness Isak Grünberg speaks of transports arriving from Auschwitz, and also hints at transports from Theresienstadt via Treblinka. The same witness as well as a member of the *SS-Bauleitung* in Smolensk confirm that Polish Jews were detained at Trostenets. Another witness, Ernst Schlesinger, speaks of transports arriving with Jews from Poland and France (cf. §2.6.). The Jewish partisan leader Hersh Smolar (Smoliar), who operated in the Minsk area and had at his disposal a wide network of informants, including Jews working at the Minsk railway station, writes with regard to the first half of 1943 that "large parties of Jews from Warsaw, Paris and Prague were brought to the vicinity of Minsk and Trostenitz where they were annihilated."<sup>[64]</sup> H.G. Adler mentions transports from Holland and Luxembourg in his description of Trostenets, without, however, providing a source for this assertion (§2.4.). Belarusian-Jewish writer Emanuil Joffe contends that "tens of thousands of Jews from Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Poland, France, Holland, Hungary, and, possibly other European countries" met their death at Trostenets.<sup>[65]</sup>

In this context it is interesting to note that similar assertions are made regarding three other camps in *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, namely:

- The Jewish labor camp at Vievis, northwest of the Lithuanian capital of Vilna, located along the Vilna-Kovno railroad. Established in early 1942, its commandant was a German officer of unknown rank named Deling; the German organization or department responsible for the camp appears to be also unknown. In mid-1943 the camp came under the supervision of the Vilna City Commissar.[\[66\]](#) Many of the inmates worked on constructing a highway between Vilna and Kovno. The camp also seems to have functioned as a transit camp from where Jews were transferred to other labor camps in Lithuania. In the first half of 1942 an unknown number of Polish Jews from Łódź were sent to Vievis, no doubt via the "extermination camp" Chełmno. Hundreds of them were transferred to Riga in July 1942.[\[67\]](#) In early 1943, according to diary entries penned by the Jewish ghetto librarian Herman Kruk, 19,000 Dutch Jews arrived in Vievis, which they must have reached via the "extermination camps" Auschwitz and Sobibór.[\[68\]](#)
- The Salaspils camp[\[69\]](#) east of the Latvian capital of Riga, located along the Riga-Daugavpils railroad. Established in the autumn of 1941 and assigned to KdS Latvia. The first Jewish inmates were German, Austrian and Czech Jews that had been deported to Riga. According to testimony left by the former Higher Leader of the SS and Police of Reichskommissariat Ostland Friedrich Jeckeln on 14 December 1945, between 55,000 and 87,000 Jews "from Germany, France, Belgium, Holland, Czechoslovakia, and from other occupied countries" were brought to Salaspils and "exterminated" there. The deportation of Dutch, French, Belgian and Polish Jews to the Riga region and Salaspils is confirmed by numerous eyewitness statements and news reports, although mainstream historiography knows nothing of it – which should not surprise, as such transports would by necessity have reached Latvia via one or several of the "extermination camps" in Poland.[\[70\]](#)
- Concentration Camp Vaivara, located in northern Estonia, 30 km west of the country's third largest city, Narva. The Vaivara camp itself consisted of a main camp and a nearby subcamp, confusingly also known as Vaivara, which functioned as a transit camp and was established in the summer of 1943.[\[71\]](#) Every Jew deported to Estonia in 1943 and 1944 was first sent to the Vaivara transit camp before being transported further to one of the numerous labor camps – most of them connected with the shale-oil industry – which had been established in northeastern Estonia.[\[72\]](#) According to mainstream historiography some 20,000 Jews were deported to Estonia[\[73\]](#), most of them Lithuanian and Latvian, but also some German and Czech Jews and 500 Hungarian Jewesses in June 1944. The Vaivara camp must also have seen the arrival of Polish Jews, as such were detained at the Estonian Klooga camp.[\[74\]](#) According to the deported Lithuanian Jew Lebke Distel Dutch Jews were among the inmates of Kuremäe, another of the Estonian labor camps.[\[75\]](#)

A common denominator for the above-mentioned four camps is that they were located in the vicinity of the *Generalbezirk* capital or a major city: Salaspils – Riga; Vievis – Vilna; Vaivara – Narva; Maly Trostenets – Minsk. Another is that they had direct railway access (in the case of Trostenets from August 1942 onward).[\[76\]](#) Vaivara stands out from the others as it was established only in the late summer of 1943. It appears likely, though, that Vaivara functioned as a replacement for the Jägala camp, which was located near the Estonian capital of Tallinn (Reval) and was closed down in August 1943,[\[77\]](#) the month

before Vaivara was officially established. Jägala was also located near a railway station (Raasiku). This possible replacement may have been caused by the growing importance of the Estonian shale-oil industry, which was concentrated in the northeastern part of the country, i.e. near Narva.<sup>[78]</sup>

It could have been that these four camps, each located in one of the four *Generalbezirk of Reichskommissariat Ostland* (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and White Russia), functioned as transit points for at least part of the large numbers of Jews deported east via the "extermination camps" in Poland. Many of the Jews reaching these camps would then have been transferred, in trucks, in carts or on foot, to labor camps, collective farms and ghettos that lacked direct access to the railway network.

If we accept the working hypothesis that Trostenets functioned as transit point in a resettlement program, then some of the anomalies encountered in mainstream historiography no longer seem that odd. In an affidavit from 5 November 1945 (2620-PS) the former head of the SS-RSHA Security Service and commander of *Einsatzgruppe D, SS- Gruppenführer Otto Ohlendorf* stated:

*"We also had these vehicles [the alleged "gas vans"] stationed in the neighborhood of the transit camps [Durchgangslager] into which the victims were brought. The victims were told that they would be resettled and had to climb into the vehicle for that purpose. After that the doors were closed and the gas streamed in through the starting of the vehicle; the victims died within 10 to 15 minutes. The cars were then driven to the burial place, where the corpses were taken out and buried."*<sup>[79]</sup>

This description would fit the orthodox version of the events at Maly Trostenets perfectly if it weren't for the word "transit camps". Significantly, in the official English translation of this affidavit the word "*Durchgangslager*", transit camps, has been deceptively mistranslated as "transient camps".<sup>[80]</sup> This "Freudian slip" indicates that the *Einsatz-Gruppe* commanders were likely aware of Trostenets and other "extermination sites" as transit camps.

The existence of the separate "holding camp" at Trostenets (cf. §2.10.), which appears more than a little strange seen from the viewpoint of orthodox historiography, also makes sense in the light of the resettlement hypothesis.

Christian Gerlach notes that:

*"Apparently a few others [from the Jewish convoys] were also sent from there [Trostenets] to other places, for example to the forced labor camp in Wilejka"*<sup>[81]</sup>

We should recall here Gerlach's report (§2.8.) that 250 Polish Jews were transferred from Trostenets to Smolensk. This of course begs the question: how many such "exceptions" were there?

Speaking of "exceptions" we may also note in passing, that while orthodox historians maintain that Transport Da 221 from Theresienstadt, which arrived in Baranovichi<sup>[82]</sup> on 31 July 1942, was exterminated by the local *KdS Aussenstelle*, Gerlach notes that, according to the witness "B.K.", some 100 Czech Jews were delivered at this time to the nearby Koldichevo camp.<sup>[83]</sup> Gerlach calls this camp, which was established in December 1941 by the KdS some 20 km north of Baranovichi, a "labor and extermination camp", although Georg Heuser during his trial called it a *Schutzhaftlager* (protective custody camp). Gerlach further states that a total of 22,000 people were murdered in this camp. The origin of this figure, however, is yet another Soviet "investigative" committee.<sup>[84]</sup> In a West German

trial verdict from 1966 the camp is linked to the aforementioned Koldichevo estate as well as to *Organisation Todt*.[\[85\]](#)

### 4.3. Maly Trostenets and Anti-Partisan Activities

It is clear that Trostenets served a role in operations against partisans near Minsk. This is confirmed by the fact that the village of Maly Trostenets, which was located along the road that led up to the estate, was turned into a *Wehrdorf* (protected village) in May 1943 on order of *Generalkommissar* Kube. This meant that the former villagers were resettled and replaced with farmers loyal to the Germans. All new male villagers fit for military service were trained and armed to fight locally active partisans.[\[86\]](#) Gerlach and Rentrop[\[87\]](#) both state that "suspected bandits" were executed at Trostenets; Gerlach mentions a figure of some 3,000 killed (cf. §2.8). A Belarusian Catholic priest and resistance fighter by the name of Wincent Godlewski (Vincent Hadleŭski) was reportedly shot at Trostenets on 24 December 1942 (the date may however suggest a propagandistic distortion of events).[\[88\]](#)

### 5. Conclusion

Close to 70 years after the end of World War II the history of Maly Trostenets and the mass killings allegedly perpetrated there still remains very much shrouded in obscurity. Even though the available evidence does not permit us to exclude the possibility of German-conducted mass executions in and around the camp, there are many reasons to be skeptical of the orthodox portrayal of Trostenets as a "death camp". The bulk of the orthodox historiography on the camp is derived from post-war testimony, whereas the only documentary evidence for the mass killings consists of the questionable *Gruppe Arlt* activity reports, furnished by Communist Czechoslovakia in the early 1960s, and the only material "evidence" of that adduced in the 1944 survey of an Extraordinary State Commission headed by Nikolai Burdenko, the man behind the fraudulent Soviet Katyn commission.

Many questions remain which may be answered by future archival research. Among those are:

- Has any documentation from the camp been preserved? I have found no references to such material, which needless to say does not mean that it has not been preserved. Especially inmate lists or notes on the arrival of new detainees would be valuable for determining the backgrounds of the Jewish inmates and the actual numbers of the arrivals selected for work at the Trostenets estate.
- Do there exist any wartime aerial photographs of Trostenets? Considering the proximity of the camp to Minsk this seems likely. If so, what do they tell us about the mass graves at the Blagovshchina site? Air photos taken in 1941 would also be of much value as a means to verify Kuznyetsov's claim of NKVD mass graves at the site.
- Why was the Blagovschina copse an off-limits area until at least the late 1980s?
- From where does Adler (1974) derive his assertions that Jews from Holland and Luxembourg were brought to Trostenets?
- How many other German-run former kolkhozes and sovkhoses existed in the vicinity of Trostenets? Did they employ Jews as forced labor? If so, have there been preserved any lists of these workers?

Such archival research would preferably also include a survey of all witness testimonies relating to the camp. What more do they have to tell us about the transports to Trostenets and the backgrounds of the arrivals? Also, do we have any indications as to the number of cremation pyres used at Blagovshchina?

Most important, however, there is need for a complete opening of all archives relating to the German occupiers' treatment of Jews in eastern territories, as well as all records on NKVD activity in the area prior to the war, combined with an exhaustive forensic-archaeological investigation of the Blagovshchina and Shashkovka sites conducted by an international and impartial scientific committee. Only then could it be determined how many people actually perished at Trostenets during the German occupation, and if it really warrants the epithet of "extermination camp".

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#### Notes:

- [1] P. Kohl, *Das Vernichtungslager Trostenez*, op.cit., pp. 19-20. Translation by author.
- [2] *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- [3] GARF 7021-93-21, pp. 15-18.
- [4] Cf. maps reproduced in *Margers Vestermanis, Juden in Riga. Auf den Spuren des Lebens und Wirken einer ermordeten Minderheit*, Edition Temmen, Bremen 1995, p. 61, 64.
- [5] "Forensic report of the Extraordinary State Commission on atrocities committed in the Salaspils camp", GARF 7021-93-52, pp. 20-23; reproduced as document no. 17 in: *Latvija pod igom natsizma. Sbornik arhivnay dokumentov* (Latvia under the Nazi Yoke: A Collection of Archive Documents), Europa Publishing House, Moscow 2006, pp. 104-109.
- [6] K. Kangeris, U. Neiburgs, R. Viksne, "Salaspils noņemne: vestures avoti un historiografiskais materials", in: *Okupācijas Rezīmi Baltijas Valstīs 1940-1991, Latvijas Vesturnieku Komisijas Raksti, 25 sejums*, Latvijas vestures instituta apgads, Riga 2009, pp. 204-208, 223.
- [7] Dt. Informationsstelle (ed.), *Amtliches Material zum Massenmord von Katyn*, Eher, Berlin 1943.
- [8] "Report of the Special Commission on the shooting of Polish officer prisoners in the Katyn Forest", in *Soviet Government Statements on Nazi Atrocities*, op. cit., pp. 107-136; also online: <http://www.codoh.com/trials/trikatyn.html>
- [9] Manfred Zeidler, *Stalinjustiz contra NS-Verbrechen*, Hannah-Arendt-Institut, Dresden 1996, pp. 28-29.
- [10] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikolai\\_Burdenko](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikolai_Burdenko)



- [11] Nuremberg Document 54-USSR. Also reproduced in: *Soviet Government Statements on Nazi Atrocities*, op. cit., pp. 283-300.
- [12] C. Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, op.cit., p. 770, n. 1471. Translation by author.
- [13] Cf. R. Wright, I. Hanson, J. Sterenberg, "The Archaeology of Mass Graves", in: John Hunter, Margaret Cox (eds.), *Forensic Archaeology: Advances in Theory and Practice*, Routledge, London/New York 2005, pp. 147-148.
- [14] Igor Kuznyetsov, "V poiskah pravda, ili Tragedija Trostenca: do i posle" ("In Search of Truth; or, The Tragedy of Trostenets: Before and After"), *Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta*, No. No. 1416 (April 2, 2004).
- [15] The Wikipedia entry mentions A.I. Zaleskiĭ, I.V. Stalin i kovarstvo ego politicheskikh protivnikov, 2 vols., Minsk, 1999–2002.
- [16] Joachim Hoffmann, *Stalins Vernichtungskrieg 1941-1945*, Verlag für Wehrwissenschaften, Munich 1995, pp. 188-189. The source is the article "300 000 Tote im Goldbergwerk", *Der Spiegel*, No. 40, 1989, pp. 200-202; online: <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-13496603.html>
- [17] <http://www.massviolence.org/Kurapaty-1937-1941-NKVD-Mass-Killings-in-Soviet-Belarus>
- [18] Ilya Ehrenburg, "Nakanune" ("The Day Before"), *Pravda*, 7 August 1944.
- [19] Eugen Kogon, Hermann Langbein, Adalbert Rückerl et al., *Nazi Mass Murder: A Documentary History of the Use of Poison Gas*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1993, p. 70.
- [20] P. Kohl, *Das Vernichtungslager Trostenez*, op. cit., p. 59 Translation by author.
- [21] *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- [22] *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- [23] Modern satellite photos of the Blagovshchina site disclose only an open area covered with gravel or sand and a number of small paths; no contours of mass graves can be discerned. Cf. [http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/google\\_map\\_Minsk.htm](http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/google_map_Minsk.htm)
- [24] P. Kohl, *Das Vernichtungslager Trostenez*, op. cit., pp. 16-18. Translation by author.
- [25] *Ibid.*, p. 77.
- [26] Of the 40,000 figure proposed by Gerlach only 6,500 refer to the period when the alleged mass executions were carried out at the Shashkovka site, cf. §2.8.

- [27] Cf. Jürgen Graf, Thomas Kues, Carlo Mattogno, *Sobibór. Holocaust and Propaganda*, TBR Books, Washington DC 2010, chapter 5.3.
- [28] *Unsere Ehre heisst Treue. Kriegstagebuch des Kommandostabes Reichsführer SS, Tätigkeitsberichte der 1. und 2. SS-Inf.-Brigade, der 1. SS-Kav.-Brigade und von Sonderkommandos der SS*, Europa Verlag, Vienna/Frankfurt/Zurich 1965.
- [29] Ibid., facsimiles on pp. 236, 240-247.
- [30] *Unsere Ehre heisst Treue*, op. cit., pp. v-vi.
- [31] Peter Longerich and Dieter Pohl quote from the Arlt reports, giving as reference "Zentrales Staatsarchiv Prag; ZStL Dok. Slg. CSSR Bd. 332, Bl. 41 (Kopie)"; P. Longerich, Dieter Pohl, *Die Ermordung der europäischen Juden*, Piper, Munich 1989, p. 160.
- [32] *Unsere Ehre heisst Treue*, op. cit., pp. 237-239.
- [33] Ibid., pp. 248-249.
- [34] Y. Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, op. cit., p. 254.
- [35] *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, vol. XIX, pp. 196-197.
- [36] NARB, 378-1-784.
- [37] Reproduced in *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, vol. XIX, p. 210.
- [38] [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kreisauer\\_Kreis](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kreisauer_Kreis)
- [39] C. Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, op. cit., p. 758 n. 1383.
- [40] Gerlach states as reference ZStA Minsk 378-1-784, p. 63.
- [41] C. Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, op. cit., p. 758, n. 1387.
- [42] Ibid., n. 1391. As archival reference for this document Gerlach gives ZStA Minsk 378-1-784, p. 63.
- [43] P. Kohl, *Das Vernichtungslager Trostenez*, op. cit., p. 63.
- [44] C. Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, op. cit., p. 759, n. 1395.
- [45] Paul Kohl, *Das Vernichtungslager Trostenez*, op. cit., p. 65; Brockhaus Wahrig Deutsches Wörterbuch, vol. 6, F.A. Brockhaus, Wiesbaden 1984, p. 862; also German Army Organization, <http://deutsches-afrikakorps.blogspot.com/2010/12/german-army-organization.html>
- [46] P. Kohl, *Das Vernichtungslager Trostenez*, op. cit., p. 62.

- [47] Pierre Marais, *Les camions à gaz en question, Polémiques*, Paris 1994. See also the forthcoming volume *The Gas Vans: A Critical Investigation* by Santiago Alvarez (TBR Books 2011).
- [48] Document 501-PS. For a discussion of this document cf. the forthcoming S. Alvarez, *The Gas Vans: A Critical Investigation*. Translated from German by the author.
- [49] See the forthcoming S. Alvarez, *The Gas Vans: A Critical Investigation*,, chapter 2.2.3.
- [50] Carlo Mattogno, *Il Campo di Chelmno tra Storia e Propaganda*, Effepi, Genoa 2009, p. 17, 58, 89, 144.
- [51] Document 501-PS.
- [52] P. Kohl, *Das Vernichtungslager Trostenez*, op. cit., p. 70.
- [53] Cf. Justiz und NS-Verbrechen, vol. XXIII, APA Holland University Press/K.G. Sauer Verlag, Amsterdam/Munich 1998, p. 622.
- [54] C. Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, op. cit., pp. 694, 760-761.
- [55] P. Kohl, *Das Vernichtungslager Trostenez*, op. cit., p. 48.
- [56] Ibid., p. 53.
- [57] Ibid., p. 59. Translated by author.
- [58] C. Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, op. cit., p. 333.
- [59] Ibid., pp. 334-335.
- [60] Ibid., p. 358.
- [61] Ibid., p. 339.
- [62] Ibid., p. 341.
- [63] Ibid., pp. 333-334.
- [64] Hersh Smoliar, *Resistance in Minsk*, Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum, Oakland (Cal.) 1966, p. 70.
- [65] E. Joffe, Aktualjnye voprosy izuchenija holokosta na territorii sovjetskoj belorussii v gody vtoroj mirovoj vojny, op. cit. Translated by author.
- [66] Neringa Latvyte-Gustaitiene, "The Genocide of the Jews in the Trakai Region of Lithuania", online:  
[http://www.jewishgen.org/LITVAK/HTML/OnlineJournals/genocide\\_of\\_the\\_jews.htm](http://www.jewishgen.org/LITVAK/HTML/OnlineJournals/genocide_of_the_jews.htm)

- [67] T. Kues, "Evidence for the Presence of 'Gassed' Jews in the Occupied Eastern Territories, Part 2", op. cit., §3.3.19.
- [68] Thomas Kues, "Evidence for the Presence of 'Gassed' Jews in the Occupied Eastern Territories, Part 1", §3.3.1.  
Online: [http://www.inconvenienthistory.com/archive/2010/volume\\_2/number\\_2/evidence\\_for\\_the\\_presence\\_of\\_gassed\\_jews.php](http://www.inconvenienthistory.com/archive/2010/volume_2/number_2/evidence_for_the_presence_of_gassed_jews.php)
- [69] Coincidentally the first Jewish inmates of Trostenets were two German Jews who accompanied a cattle transport from Salaspils in early May 1942; cf. C. Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, op. cit., p. 769, n. 1462; P. Rentrop, "Maly Trostinez", op. cit., p. 578.
- [70] T. Kues, "Evidence for the Presence of 'Gassed' Jews in the Occupied Eastern Territories, Part 1", op. cit., §3.1.2, 3.2.3, 3.3.2, 3.3.5, 3.3.9; "Evidence for the Presence of 'Gassed' Jews in the Occupied Eastern Territories, Part 2", op. cit., §3.3.14., 3.4.
- [71] Wolfgang Benz, Barbara Distel, *Der Ort des Terrors: Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*, vol. 8, C.H. Beck, Munich 2008, p. 178. The Vaivara camp itself was, however, not officially established until 15 September 1943; A. Weiss-Wendt, *Murder without Hatred.*, op. cit., p. 257.
- [72] Anton Weiss-Wendt, *Murder without Hatred. Estonians and the Holocaust*, Syracuse University Press, New York 2009, p. 257.
- [73] Rose Cohen, Saul Issroff (eds.), *The Holocaust in Lithuania 1941-1945: A Book of Remembrance*, vol. 1, Gefen Publishing 2002, p. 23.
- [74] T. Kues, "Evidence for the Presence of 'Gassed' Jews in the Occupied Eastern Territories, Part 1", op. cit., §3.3.1.
- [75] *Ibid.*, §3.3.7.
- [76] It is interesting to note that a number of other "extermination sites" in the occupied eastern territories had access to the railway network, for example Rumbula (outside Riga) and Ponary (Paneriai, the site for the alleged extermination of the Vilna Jews); cf. Frida Michelson, *I Survived Rumbuli*, Holocaust Library, New York 1979, p. 88; Herman Kruk, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania*, Yale University Press, New Haven/London 2002 pp. 500, 511. On 9 September 1942 the Jews in the Caucasian town of Kislodovsk were evacuated by train under the "pretext" that they would be resettled in "the sparsely populated regions of the Ukraine" and then supposedly shot in a nearby antitank trench; Y. Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, op. cit., pp. 239-294. In its "Daily News Bulletin" from 20 November 1942 the Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported that the Germans were "continuing to carry out ruthlessly their policy of deporting all Jews" from Latvia. The Jews were taken from the Riga Ghetto to "assembly stations", where they were loaded on cattle trucks and sent away.

According to the report, which had been received by the Federation of Jewish Relief Organisations in London, "the inhabitants of the Riga Ghetto are gradually transported to the East according to plan." Cf. also the unchecked (by author) report in Ukrainian newspapers in 1996, according to which Kiev Jews were deported from Babi Yar via a nearby military railroad station to Minsk; Herbert Tiedemann, "Babi Yar: Critical Questions and Comments", in: Germar Rudolf (ed.), *Dissecting the Holocaust*, 2nd ed., Theses & Dissertations Press, Chicago 2003, p. 503. See also *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., Thomson Gale 2007, vol. 12, p. 151: "Since the location [Babi Yar] was near the Petrovski goods railway station, and owing to the rumours about evacuation of the Jews to other towns or camps, nobody suspected what was coming."

- [77] Lukáš Přibyl, "Die Geschichte des Theresienstädter Transports 'Be' nach Estland", in: Miroslav Kárný et al (eds.), *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente 2001*, Institut Theresienstädter Initiative, Prague 2001, p. 184.
- [78] A. Weiss-Wendt, *Murder without Hatred*, op. cit., pp. 248-249, 257.
- [79] Translated from IMT, vol. XXXI, p. 41.
- [80] Cf. Nuremberg Military Tribunals, vol. IV, US Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1950, p. 206.
- [81] C. Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, op. cit., p. 756, n. 1373. The source given is an interrogation from 1959. Translated by author.
- [82] Like Minsk, Baranovichi is connected with possible transports from the "extermination camps" in Poland: On 4 August 1942 a postcard arrived in Warsaw from a Jewess who wrote that she had been deported to Baranovichi, where she worked as a farm laborer; Abraham Lewin, *A Cup of Tears. A Diary of the Warsaw Ghetto*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1988, p. 147. Cf. also the claim that Ignatz Burstein had been deported by the Germans from Łódź to Baranovichi (§2.2.). It might possibly be of significance that the Koldichevo camp was opened the same month that the Chełmno "extermination camp" became operative, i.e. in December 1941.
- [83] C. Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, op. cit., p. 759, n. 1393.
- [84] *Ibid.*, p. 771.
- [85] LG München I 113 Ks 1/65 from 21 January 1966, in: *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, vol. XXIII, APA Holland University Press/K.G. Saur Verlag, Amsterdam/Munich 1998, pp. 19-20.
- [86] P. Kohl, *Das Vernichtungslager Trostenez*, op.cit., p. 15; See also Maly Trostenez, <http://www.letzter-gruss-online.de/41306/41351.html>
- [87] P. Rentrop, "Maly Trostinez", op. cit., p. 578.

[88] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wincent\\_Godlewski](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wincent_Godlewski)

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